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Mary Marley

PII Redacted

### HORSESHOE BRINGS LUCK

Stan and I were married July 1st, 1939. We spent a month-long honeymoon in France. Although the clouds of war were hanging ominously in the air, we decided at the end of our honeymoon to go back home to pursue our respective careers. We returned to Lodz, Poland, barely five days prior to the onslaught of the German army, which began on September 1, 1939. We had only seven days to spend in our brand new, beautiful apartment when the call came over the radio that the officers of the reserves were ordered to march towards Warsaw to join the Polish army in the defense of the capital. As a young bride, I decided to go along with my husband. How I proposed to join the army, I really did not know, but I did not want to be separated from my husband, and in my mind it was a valid enough reason to go with him.

In great haste we grabbed a few odds and ends we could lay our hands on: a dozen silver spoons, a pair of summer sandals with high heels, some pieces of clothing, two dozens new socks, a book.. With these possessions we set out to fight the enemy. A young couple living in our building joined us in this endeavor and, somewhere along the way, we met another couple with a lovely, seven year old girl, fleeing like so many towards Warsaw. We decided to pool our resources, and managed to acquire a creaky hay wagon with an old decrepit horse. The horse certainly did not look as though it could pull us over 80 miles to Warsaw, but it was better than marching.

We set out at night under cover of darkness. The German planes were flying very low, mercilessly bombarding the highways which were filled with the fleeing civilian population. There were farmers with their livestock, running away from the north western part of the country which was already in the hands of the invaders. The army detachments could not develop any speed to reach their destination because cows, mules, goats, chickens and geese were in their way. There were all kinds of farm vehicles drawn by horses and oxen in total disarray, children were crying, some having been lost in the darkness, women lamenting their lost possessions. It was utter, indescribable bedlam on the narrow highway. We plodded along amidst this endless sea of humanity, with Stan acting in the capacity of driver.

Suddenly our horse began limping heavily, and our wagon came precariously close to breaking down. Apparently the horse had lost a horseshoe. We pulled to the side of the road, and in desperation, my husband put on the horses' lame leg a dozen of brand new socks which we had taken along. The horse straightened up and continued to pull the heavy wagon, though not for long. When the horse had gone through all twenty four socks, he started limping again. The night was pitch dark, not even a sliver of the moon was shining over us.







Even though it was strictly forbidden, a soldier tried to light a cigarette, and in the flicker of the light Stan glimpsed a piece of shiny metal on the road. On an impulse he jumped off the wagon, and lo and behold, it was a horseshoe! All we needed now were some nails. In darkness Stan began searching for the soldiers, hoping they might be able to direct him to an army supply unit, meanwhile I was yelling at the top of my lungs out of fear that we could become separated in the darkness.

Luck was with us - a few steps behind us was a supply unit and Stan returned with a fistful of nails. Little did we know that horses have different sizes of hooves and that horseshoes come in different shapes. Yet lady luck was with us again - the horseshoe fit and my husband shod the horse, driving the nails with a heavy rock, while we were holding the old nag to keep it from kicking. I wish I could have seen this in bright daylight!

We all hopped on the wagon again, and reached the outskirts of Warsaw which was, by that time, already in flames and besieged by the Germans. There was no way for us to get through. Resignedly, we settled down in a peasant's hut to await further developments or army orders.

My dozen silver spoons came in very handy for bartering purposes. Nobody wanted to accept worthless Polish money. We paid with the spoons for the meager lodging - one small room with a dirt floor, strewn with six straw mattresses, and we acquired, among other supplies, a live piglet. City-bred people. we had no idea how to tackle the killing of the screeching animal, but the kindly farmer helped us after watching with a benign smile our efforts. We sat down to our first and last decent meal on the road. With no refrigeration on a hot September day, we had to leave most of our piglet to the flies which had a feast.

We did not know what to do next. In horror we watched the fierce battles, the constant bombardment of Warsaw, the resulting fires which lit the sky, the destruction and the tremendous loss of human lives. Refusing to face reality, the little girl's mother wailed that she absolutely had to go to Warsaw to her favorite beautician for a shampoo.

Stan and I debated what to do, not knowing what awaits us if we returned home. But once Warsaw fell to the invaders, we realized that all was lost and that there was no point in reaching whatever was left of the burning city. We returned home, hoping that we would find our way out of the darkness closing in all around us.







Mary Marley

## BOWL OF SOUP

The year was 1941. The Warsaw Ghetto was filled to the brim. In the area that could hardly contain 40,000 population, 300,000 people have been squeezed, one family, no matter how small or how large, to a room. There was no breathing space, no privacy. Food was scarce, hardly any money to get whatever has been smuggled into Ghetto. About six months after the Ghetto was tightly locked, the bell to our apartment which my husband and I have shared with five other families, did not stop ringing. At the door stood people in dirty clothing, begging for a few coins. There were wizened people, shriveled mothers with small children in tatters, emaciated, their faces grey, eyes deep set in the sockets, desperately looking at us. When we inquired where they came from, we were told that the Germans decided to liquidate smaller ghettos in neighboring towns, and dump all the remaining Jews into our already terribly overcrowded ghetto. They were simply thrown in to fend for themselves. The Jewish Community placed them in unused school buildings - there was no formal schooling anymore allowed in the ghetto - but the Community was unable to provide them with any other basic necessities such as food.

At the beginning we tried to give them a few pennies, but we soon came to the realization that it did not present any meaningful practical help to their plight. There was hunger that had to be assuaged. Thus the operation "A bowl of soup" came into being.

The apartment where we had our room, was in a huge building complex. There were actually three large buildings interconnected by the backyards. A few women from the complex gathered together to decide how best to help those still less fortunate than we were. We came upon an idea to organize all families in the building, and perhaps spread this action into other buildings, to donate a bowl of soup once a week per each family.

Cooking in the ghetto was far from easy. It was hard to get the necessary products, so we cooked whatever we could obtain on the black market from smugglers. Gas was a scarce commodity. The supply







of gas that would be sufficient for 40 to 50,000 people, had to be now spread for over 400,000. The pressure was so low that we often had to cook late in the evening or in the middle of the night. Tempers flared when the unhappy women had to accommodate each other to use gas under those circumstances. Fights and screams were a common occurrence.

However, we did not give up our project. We have formed a committee, and each woman had to visit all the apartments in her building to explain the situation, and to get a promise of a bowl of soup once a week on designated days. In most cases we got full cooperation. As impoverished as we were, there was still enough compassion and understanding of the dire needs of the other people.

It was further decided that every day a few able bodied men from the refugee shelter would come with big kettles to collect the soup under the supervision of the women from our committee. It certainly did not matter what kind of soup it was. Often we did not know ourselves what we were eating as long as it was edible, and above all, hot. It provided nourishment instead of useless money. Sometimes women would add a slab of bread with the soup. After the soup has been collected and the kettles were full, two women from the donating buildings would go to the shelter to supervise the orderly and proper distribution.

It is impossible to describe the crowded and unsanitary conditions in this refugee home, but at least the people were kept alive with that one bowl of soup which often was their only meal for the day.

This operation continued until the first day of the "final solution" when refugees from the shelters were the first to be taken away never to be seen again.

by Mary Marley

PII Redacted







Mary Marley

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#### THE DAY OF LIBERATION

After the unsuccessful Polish uprising in Warsaw in 1944, my husband went, as he was directed by the Underground Forces, to a small village which had been known to harbor and help the partisans. Meanwhile, I joined two Gentile sisters who escaped with us from the convoy taking us to Germany. We arrived at a small village where one of the sisters had known the relatives of her husband, who unfortunately perished during the uprising. The local authorities which took care of the refugees streaming from Warsaw, sent me to a family consisting of a couple and their teenage son. Their house burned down from an incendiary bomb in the first days of the war in 1939. They put a partition in the stable, thus creating a small room in which the three of them had been living. Now I joined them.

Though simple, practically illiterate peasants, with only 3 acres, 2 cows and a horse to their name, they were wonderful people, caring and understanding. When I arrived at their doorstep, after the deprivations of a long period of hiding and a subsequent two months siege of Warsaw, I weighed less than 90 lbs. During the siege, we had no light, no gas, no water and no food. They fed me, nursed me back to health, and took great care of me, without asking for anything in return. Their son fashioned wooden shoes to replace my torn sandals.

Of course, they did not know my true identity, but I gathered from many conversations that it would not matter to them, if they had known it. They were deeply religious. I often heard them saying how sorry they were for the Jews with whom they had dealings prior to the war. They argued with other peasants that Jews were human beings created in God's image just like anybody else, and they did not deserve their lot. Such sympathy was not shared by many Poles.

The end of the war was rapidly approaching. The front lines were becoming shorter and shorter, coming closer to us. It was February 1945. we already knew that the Germans were in retreat, and all around us the Russian army units were chasing them. We could hear their artillery.

One morning there was a loud knock at the door of our cubicle. As soon as we opened it, six Germans, heavily armed, barged in. From what they told us, I understood that they were fleeing, and they could only do so under the cover of the night to avoid the Russians, or "Ivans" as they called them. They still seemed to be very sure of themselves, claiming that they were winning the war. They were ordered to rejoin their units. Meanwhile they had to stay in our hut. They ordered food from the peasant wife, and forbade us to leave the hut fearing that we would betray their whereabouts. Around noon the peasant's son asked for permission to go next door to feed the animals which they reluctantly granted.







At this very moment, the Russians, half drunk as usual, rolled on tanks through our lonely side road, where besides our stable, only three other equally poor peasants were living in small straw thatched huts. The unsuspecting Russians sat on top of their tanks, singing lustily. It never occurred to them that any Germans could have been possibly hiding in such a place, away from the main road. They would have merrily gone further, if it were not for the stupid Germans in our hut. They grabbed their machine guns, while I desperately tried to prevent any shooting. Emboldened by the presence of the Russians, I attempted to reason with the Germans, insisting that they should lay low and let the Russians continue on their way. Despite my pleas, the Germans started shooting wildly. Only after the six Germans opened the front, did I realize that in the other three huts along the road many more Germans were hiding, and they naturally followed the example of their comrades. A big battle ensued.

Our small cubicle was soon filled with dense smoke. The peasants and I were crouching behind a huge hope chest - a prized possession of the farmer's wife. On top of the chest was spread my woolen blanket - my one and only possession. This blanket had been with me from the beginning of the war. I carried it from Lodz to Warsaw, I had it in the Warsaw Ghetto, and smuggled it out of the Ghetto into hiding. It was to me like a security blanket to a child.

When the wild shooting started, I thought it was my last moment. I saw before my eyes the six years of suffering, loss of family, deprivations. It made me really mad to be killed practically in zero hour of my so longed for liberation. While I was pondering this strange quirk of fate, something that looked like an elongated orange pumpkin with a small stem, was thrown in and fell under my feet. Little did I know what it was. After the whole battle was over, and I helped to clear the debris, I threw this strange object far into the field. It exploded, and I realized then how lucky we had been that it failed to explode when it fell so near us.

We continued to lay low behind the hope chest, the farmers praying silently, when suddenly the shooting stopped. Through the narrow slit in the entrance door I saw the farmer's son yelling at us to get out as fast as we could. The Germans asked me to translate, and I lied that the Russians have gone away, and we could safely go out. The farmers and I sprinted to the door, and even though the disbelieving Germans shot at us in the last moment from close range, they missed us. Instead, they hit a young Russian lieutenant, who was standing behind our young boy, looking curiously into the smoky hut. What transpired in the meantime was that our young man, seeing the raging battle, hung out a piece of white rag from the barn where he had been feeding the cows. Astonished, the Russian lieutenant asked him what was going on, who did the shooting, and how many Germans there were. They never expected an assault there, in the mistaken belief that all Germans had already fled from this part of the country. The boy told him what happened, and begged him to save us, whereupon the Russian lieutenant held up the shooting, and ordered him to get us out.







As soon as we were safely out, the Russians threw in another grenade which this time exploded, killing four Germans, and wounding the other two. Then they finished off the battle in the other three huts, rounding up about 80 German soldiers. Meanwhile, the young lieutenant, who was shot through the lung, died in my arms although I desperately tried to staunch the flow of blood.

The next day the Russians ordered the Germans to dig a deep trench. They read to them a long proclamation about their atrocities committed on the Russian and Polish soil, also for killing their lieutenant, for which they have been condemned to die, and they executed them, one after the other, in the presence of all the peasants.

We were SAFE, SAFE, SAFE! I could not believe my luck. As a memento of this last day, I still have remnants of my woolen blanket, with numerous holes from the flying bullets. It still is my prized possession.

Three days later, Stan who had been liberated a few days earlier, and knew where I was, arrived riding on top of a Russian tank. This new mode of transportation was graciously provided by the Russians who thought nothing of it to carry a civilian with them while following the fleeing enemy.

We bade a fond goodbye to our farmers, and proceeded to Lodz.

\* \* \*

I would like to add an amusing anecdote concerning Stan's liberation. As mentioned ~~on~~ previously, Stan spent the last four months in a small village, protected by the Underground Forces. This was the village called Grojec, where the renewed Russian offensive had made a breakthrough through the enemy lines in the first days of February 1945.

Stan was eagerly watching the retreating German army. The village was situated at the crossroads. A German Military Policeman had been posted to direct the traffic, and to show the fleeing Germans which road to take. When the last German soldiers were rapidly disappearing on the horizon, the Russian tanks came rolling along in. Nobody in the retreating army thought of taking the German policeman along with the last units. He was left behind, dutifully performing his task, showing now the Russians to follow the road taken by the Germans. When the last tank passed by, the Russians killed the German policeman with a parting shot.

There is a well known German saying "Befehl is Befehl" which means - an order is an order. Many Nazis were later quoting this saying in the defense of their crimes.







Mary Marley

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#### ANOTHER SOPHIE'S CHOICE

Remember the movie "Sophie's Choice" in which a Gentile Holocaust Survivor of Auschwitz had to make a painful choice whether to save her little girl or her little boy from death, since she could not save both of them? Sophie in the film was, of course, a fictional character. Here is a story of another Sophie, this time a very real person who made the painful choice.

I met Sophie Waksman before the war, she was my counterpart representing a Polish district of Lublin at our weekly meetings at the Department of Commerce in Warsaw, which I attended as the head of a department from Lodz. She was the only other woman and Jewish, in the group of thirty something men, none of them Jewish. During our Thursday conferences and decision making concerning government business, we got to know each other well and we became friends.

Sophie was married and the mother of a seven month old boy. During our lunches to which we were frequently invited by several of the other heads of department, Sophie often talked about her home town and her family. We were an exceptionally friendly group, we gathered around the Secretary of Commerce, nobody was slighing us because we were both women and Jewish. We were always treated with due respect, even cordially, which was rather unusual under the circumstances since we often faced keen competition.

When the war broke out, Sophie's husband, an officer of the reserves, was called to arms. At first Sophie did not hear anything from him, until through round about way a short postcard finally reached her. She learned that her husband was interned in camp for officers-prisoners of war in Woldenberg, Germany. Woldenburg was in Eastern Prussia, near the former Polish border. At the time it was strictly a Polish Oflag (Officers' Lager). There were about 6000 Polish officers and 60-70 Jewish officers. My two older brothers were also interned in this camp, and I got most of my information from them after they had returned to Poland.

The majority of the officers was not antisemitic, however, a small group was very vocal in expressing their antisemitismus, and they requested segregation. They did not want to mix with them. They did not mind fighting for Poland alongside the Jews, but in Oflag they did not want to live under the same roof. Obviously the Germans eagerly complied. Since each barracks could house 140 prisoners, the Jews were placed separately in one half of the barrack. They were getting the same food as the others, but at times they were treated worse than the Polish officers. However, when the Swiss representatives from the Red







Cross were coming to inspect, they were able to complain. The Germans respected the Geneva convention, protecting officers in prisoners' camps. The Swiss were bringing all kinds of packages for all prisoners, they had a list of all prisoners, and they were quite attentive to the Jewish group, carefully checking their wellbeing.

My brothers told me a very interesting fact. There were a few officers who did not admit that they were Jewish, apparently their names were non-descriptive or changed, whatever. Somehow a small group of the antisemites became suspicious, and reported this to the German administration. They sent a military doctor to find out. He was an elderly man in his 70's. He came accompanied by a Polish officer-prisoner. They took the few suspected Jews to the infirmary, and ordered them to disrobe. The German doctor examined them, and wrote in his report: "NONE OF THEM IS JEWISH" He obviously wanted to help them.

Meanwhile in Poland the constant persecution forced Sophie to flee her home. She carried the baby in her arms when a German shrapnel killed the baby and slightly wounded her. She was devastated, but in order not to upset her husband who was languishing in a prisoners' camp, far away from the family, Sophie made a painful decision: she decided, that she alone will carry the terrible sorrow in her heart. In all her short letters, she was describing the child, as if the little boy were still alive. She invented little stories, how the boy was progressing, how he started walking and talking. These heart wrenching communications ended a year or two into the war, when Sophie herself disappeared in one of the concentration camps, never to be seen again.

Her husband survived the war, and upon his return, he stayed in touch with all his friends from the Oflag. That is how I learned about Sophie's sacrifice after the war not only from my brothers, but from a childhood friend of mine, a prominent writer, who spent five years with Sophie's husband in the same barrack. Mr. Waksman - Sophie's husband - died several years ago.







Mary Marley

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Dr. JANUSZ KORCZAK  
PROTECTOR OF THE ORPHANS

It is impossible to describe Janusz Korczak with one word. He was many things to many people: a physician who specialized in pediatrics, an educator, an innovator, a writer, a sociologist, a philosopher, a humanitarian, a visionary, a radio personality, and director of two orphanages. Eventually all these personalities have meshed together for one purpose only - in his own words: "How to love a child."

Who was Janusz Korczak? He was born Henryk Goldszmid in 1878 into a wealthy, assimilated Jewish family in Warsaw; his father was a prominent lawyer, his grandfather a doctor. When he was 11, his father succumbed to a mental illness, the family lapsed into penury, and young Henryk had to help his impoverished mother by tutoring.

He wanted to be a writer but he had to fulfill the promise to his father to study medicine. While still a medical student, Henryk submitted a play for a competition under an assumed Polish name taken at random from a book, and from that time on he became known as Janusz Korczak. At the same time he became friendly with a young poet who introduced him to the world of abysmal poverty. For the first time Korczak encountered Jewish beggars, orphans and abandoned children left alone on the streets of Warsaw, shivering from cold in their filthy rags, sleeping on newspapers under bridges. He was appalled and decided then and there to do something for those children. He had no desire to cater to the children of the rich, and he soon gave up his practice. He turned all his energy to writing and to work for the poor. Under his new pen name, he has written many essays about the hovels of Warsaw, many sociological and philosophical studies, and also his first book "Children of the Street". In his internship years, he acquired insight into the child's feelings. His most important work expressing his sociological credo was "How to love a







Child" consisting of three volumes (1) The Child and the Family, (2) The Boarding School and Summer Camp and (3) The Orphans Home. He has written over 20 books, many of which have been translated into 20 languages, among them in English. His best known story is "In the Court of King Matt" describing a boy-king bent on reforming the world.

Concerned with neglected, deprived and abused children, Korczak joined the Orphans Aid Society which under his guidance constructed an orphanage. In 1912 Korczak became the director of the orphanage, and moved in with his right hand, Stefania Wilczynska (Jewish, despite her Polish sounding name) a certified teacher who was my mother's first cousin and also best friend. Thus I had the privilege of learning to know Dr.Korczak personally during my numerous visits to the orphanage.

Dr.Korczak not only housed and fed the children but he created a children republic. The children have written a set of laws, rules and regulations to govern them. They elected their own parliament and judicial court. They designated their own lawyers and judges to mete punishments for transgressions. The children also decided on the chores which each had to perform. This certainly was an innovative approach to child rearing early in the 20th century when children were supposed to be spoken to but could not speak for themselves. Korczak insisted on treating the children with the same respect as one would approach the adults, and he encouraged building the child's self-esteem. Often annoyed with the difficult task of begging for the funds for his orphanage, he had infinite patience dealing with the children. He could often be seen going noiselessly at night to soothe a crying child. He stood up for children's rights, those same rights which were later incorporated in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child by the League of Nations in 1924.

In the course of a little under two years since its inception, Korczak and his orphanage were acclaimed at home and abroad. Thanks to his creative methods of rearing the children, Korczak has been invited to







direct also a Polish orphanage, thus he became the director of two orphanages. Korczak tried to reach as many people as possible with his educational ideas. He became the favorite professor at the Warsaw Free University. He had a weekly radio talk about his methods of raising the children. He served as advisor on juvenile crime to the Warsaw Municipal Court, he lectured at the Jewish Teachers Training Center, and he was also on the staff of the National Teachers Institute. He created a six page weekly supplement to a Polish language newspaper, written exclusively by the children under his supervision.

In 1937 Korczak was awarded a prestigious Golden Laurel by the Polish Academy of Literature for outstanding literary creativity. He was also a member in good standing of the International Pen Club.

In the thirties, with the growing antisemitismus and the difficulties in obtaining the necessary funds, Korczak and Stefania decided to explore the possibilities of relocating the orphanage to Palestine. They traveled there to initiate preliminary discussions but the war prevented the realisation of their plan. In 1940 the 200 orphans were forcibly removed by the Germans to very tight quarters in the Wrasaw Ghetto. Korczak and Stefania continued with their schooling and attending to their daily needs.

When the deportation began, his Gentile friends as well as the International Pen Club intervened with the German authorities which allowed Korczak to leave the Ghetto. Korczak flatly refused: "Not without my children." On August 6th, 1942, a whole detachment of Germans arrived at the orphanage. Korczak and Stefania, and about 200 children, dressed in their holiday best, marched, four abreast, carrying their own green banner of hope. Korczak carried the littlest child in his arms, Stefania held another by the hand. My husband stood on the corner of the street and observed how the children, unaware of the imminent death, went with dignity and serenity, led by their beloved doctor and Stefania, to Treblinka, a place of no return.



